

## Meeting Report: Blogs, RSS and Wikis, tools for dissemination, collaboration and information gathering

22 April 2008, John Rylands University Library, University of Manchester

*Report by Mathew Stone, Graduate Trainee Assistant Librarian, Bradford Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust*

Riding down Oxford Road on the bus at 8.45am, I had to be careful not to get off at my usual stop at Manchester's Metropolitan University (where I'm currently studying part-time for my library masters qualification) and stay seated for another five minutes or so until we pulled into the University of Manchester campus a mile or so further down.

The day began at 9am with drinks and a nice chat with the other delegates, many of whom had travelled quite a distance to be here. Regarding the other delegates in attendance, roughly half of the twenty-six were librarians like myself, with the rest working in various information-based occupations. The training proper started at 9.30 and a quick show of hands revealed that among us there were currently no "bloggers", and only a minority of us were using wikis and RSS feeds in our jobs. We'd obviously enrolled on the right course then!

Karen Blakeman was our trainer for the day. I was especially impressed with how she was able to answer all the assorted questions that were fired her way throughout the day as the delegates sought to relate all this new knowledge back to their own workplaces. Learning how to relate these swanky Web toys to actual work settings was the strongest point of the day, and why I would certainly recommend the course to anyone who works with information.

After a quick introduction to the Web 2.0 phenomenon, Karen got us started on blogs by talking us through the anatomy of blogs, potential applications, using them as a source of information and finally, how to go about setting up your own blog. I heard with interest that setting up your own blog can be a great way of recording your own professional development and reflective practice, which I reckon will be just the ticket for me when I go through my chartering process in the next year or so. After about 90 minutes of talking we then got to spend a similar amount of time having a play around with what we'd just learnt about. Some spent this time having a go setting up their own blog, while the rest of us tried to see how we could use existing blogs as a means of keeping up to date within our own sectors.

It was around 12.15 when Karen called our playtime to an end and spoke until lunch on the subject of wikis. We were told about the different types of wikis, how they can be applied for real life tasks such as collaborating on documents, training, organising conferences, compiling subject guides and even using them to replace your intranet.

After lunch, and a further opportunity to have a play around, this time with the wikis, we moved onto RSS feeds around 3.00. Karen talked about the strengths and weaknesses of using RSS, and also of the various readers such as Bloglines, Google Reader and my new favourite online discovery, Pageflakes (<http://www.pageflakes.com>). By the time 4.30pm came around, with attention spans finally beginning to wander, Karen wrapped things up and the delegates made their journeys homeward, hopefully like me having enjoyed the day and looking forward to trying out these Web 2.0 applications at work the next day.